



## John Mackey's Message of Entrepreneurial Empowerment

By Luca Gattoni-Celli February 5, 2013

Whole Foods Founder & CEO John Mackey is a man on many missions. He advocates good eating and wholesome living, of course, but he also has a higher calling. He wants to defend liberty. He wants to champion capitalism in the public square. He wants to share the beautiful ideas of Hayek, von Mises, and Friedman, which opened his eyes to “how the world really works.” And he wants you to revel in the wonder of a system that has surrounded you with previously unimaginable prosperity. He wants you to understand it and love it so you will defend it too.

Mackey discussed the ideas behind his new book *Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business* in a conversational interview with Tucker Carlson Monday evening at the Cato Institute. Although the book itself was hardly referenced, Mackey's libertarian message of confident capitalism grounded in compassionate values was clear. Two points in particular stood out. According to Mr. Mackey, businesspeople exhibit great ignorance about the capitalistic system. His view is shared by Cato President John Allison and organizations such as the Bastiat Society, which was founded to educate businesspeople about the market process. Entrepreneurs' reluctance to embrace market principles and espouse capitalism's virtues places them in a disadvantageously defensive position in dealing with its many critics. Mackey's vision is that businesspeople espouse the system by which they benefit society.

The second consideration of note was existential, a pall hanging over all else like the specter of collectivism. We need to have two major conversations in the 21st century, Mackey said. The first is about how to roll back government, which has grown so large as to threaten calamity. The second is defining the proper roles of government, which he sees as legitimate and important but, as a minarchist, severely limited. He did not address these broad concerns, however; his main purpose was presenting a compelling narrative intended for a uniquely vulnerable, strategically important audience. As noted, he pitched his book as a resource for businesspeople to empower themselves in a world that badly misunderstands them.

One observation of particular insight was the unfortunate double standard businesspeople face in the court of public opinion. If a politician heinously betrays the public trust, even with the widely acknowledged corruption that pervades politics, his profession isn't diminished in the public eye. By contrast, Bernie Madoff and countless other business crooks stain the humble entrepreneur with their sins.

Mackey also addressed the state of economic freedom in America today:

We're in decline. And we're in decline because our economic freedom's being stripped away. ... The critics dominate the narrative, and the people who defend capitalism make a big mistake: they concede the moral high ground. ... We've got to recapture the narrative, and that's what in the book we try to do. ... People don't support capitalism to the same extent they did because they equate capitalism with crony capitalism. ... Most people are going to pursue that. And if the government's giving away money, most people are going to line up to get it. ... I think businesspeople need to speak up if we want to keep a free society. And we've already fallen to 18th (in global economic freedom).

Asked how his values impact his business, he replied, "I understand the principles that lead to prosperity in society. I understand property rights. ... I understand that it's business that's uplifted humanity," citing examples of remarkable progress in the last 200 years. Whether he will succeed is, of course, unknowable at this juncture, but as an autodidact possessed of great idealism and an entrepreneurial impulse for action, John Mackey offers a unique approach to an intractable problem: Helping the individual understand his or her precious liberty, that it may be held dear.